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THUSNELDA

A SONG of the HEART.
By
Neander P. Cook.





To them that have
And yet shall have.

THE BETROTHAL
OF
RONALD AND THUSNELDA

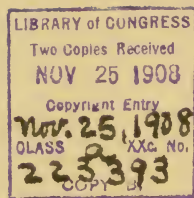
A DRAMATIC POEM

BY
NEANDER P. COOK

WITH EIGHT MOTTO-ILLUSTRATIONS.

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PRONUNCIATIONS:

Tristan tríst-an,
Thusnelda tos-nél-da,
Ragni rág-nee,
Fénsalir.
Nereid né-re-eed

Isolde is-ól-day.
Sigune sig-oó-nay.
Cunina cu-ní-na.
Freya frí-a.
Naiad ní-ad

Loki, ló-kee

PREFATORY.

*Gentle Reader! This book,
Like other tomes,
Its pictures hath,
But not with printer-presses painted.
In thy own soul's color
The images are drawn.
Sit and ponder!
The motto--text is given thee:
The sermon preach thyself.*

“Put off thy shoes
From off thy feet:
For the place whereon thou standest,
Is holy ground.”

—*Bible.*

The Bridal Hour



BRIDAL hour, thou holy hour
Hour of wonder and delight!
Thy mystery have angels laid,
But tasted not the perfect bliss

Of youth and maiden,
With the dew of hope upon their brow,
To the heart's coy trysting come,
Entwined in each other's arms,
In Amor's caldron seething,
Eye looking into eye,
Soul into soul outpouring,
Drinking deep and full
The Bridal Kiss.



THE ARGUMENT.

To the attentive observer of nature it soon becomes manifest that she has but one goal, viz., the super-abundance of life: life in innumerable forms, in countless variations and endless ecstasies, a mantle covering completely the habitable sphere, penetrating every nook and cranny in earth and sea and air, pulsating and throbbing with miraculous intensity, the very self-realization of the Infinite God. It is a harp of a thousand chords, of whose music our joys and sorrows form component parts and counterparts, but who He is that sounds it according to His will, Him we know only from afar, for we are but the finite atoms of the Infinite Soul pouring itself forth in eternal strains.

Life is creative. It finds its fullest expression in a gradually advancing evolution through ceaseless self-renewal. All nature dies today in order that more triumphantly she may be reborn to-morrow. It is in her self-renewal that she is most beautiful and interesting. For this purpose is the romance of love and the strength of passion, that the resurrection be made sure. For this the flower adorns itself in ravishing beauty and carries its enticing nectar. For this is the music of the nightingale and the affections of men. Youth and Love are nature's preparation for a further step in her progress, hence marriage is the most charming event in the divine panorama.

But what of the seed that falls by the wayside and the terrors of death? They are not meaningless, because it is life revelling in its glory, the whole path to nature's goal is strewn with flowers. True, not all the seeds can live, yet the marriage of stamen and pistil was an hour of the perfection of enjoying, since the consummation of love is nature's deepest draught. And even where the flower was broken before it had been betrothed to its waiting mate, it was in its bridal dress a thing of beauty, tremulous with the anticipation of its destiny.

Neither is death life's enemy, but rather the door of its opportunity. The old are dying that there may be room for youth with new wooing days and life be not merely endless, but run its course in a ceaseless nuptial kiss.

THE BETROTHAL OF RONALD AND THUSNELDA.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

MOMUS, *God of Satire.*

AMOR, *God of Love.*

KNIGHT RONALD OF OFTERDINGEN, *Bridegroom.*

THUSNELDA, DAUGHTER TO LOTHAR, BARON OF ALT-
NACH, *Bride.*

SIGUNE, MOTHER TO THUSNELDA.

BRIDESMAIDS.

YOUNG FLOWER-GIRL.

SECOND FLOWER-GIRL.

OLDER FLOWER-GIRL.

BERTHELIND, ETHELRIED, ROSAMUND, *Sisters to Thus-
nelda.*

RAGNI, *an Outcast.*

CUPID, *God of Love.*

THE HEAVENLY CHOIR.

NEREID AND NAIAD, *Bridal Nymphs.*

CUNINA, THE DISCONSOLATE, *a Nymph.*

THE FURIES.

FREYA, *Goddess of Health.*

PRAYER OF THE UNBORN.

EUNICE, THE UNWOODED, *a Bridesmaid.*

SCENE:

*The Castle of Ofterdingen, in the Thuringian Forests,
in part.*

The Elysian Regions, in Heaven, in part.

TIME:

The Nuptial Night.

PERIOD:

The Middle Ages.



PRELUDE.

Momus, god of satire.

Amor, god of love.

MOMUS (*satirically*) to Amor:—

On virgin-tongues,
O Amor, there goes a tale
Of two lovers,
Named Tristan and Isolde,
Which tale a riddle holds.
I trow thou canst not solve.
Isolde was daughter to a king,
But Tristan not of royal blood.
He wooed not wisely
When the princess of the land
The serf would wed.
To the desert was he banished
For his folly.
Yet hadst thou thy mischief wrought.
Hadst dipped thy arrow in his blood
And sent it through the maiden's heart.
Straightway her snow-white doves
She harnessed,
Who to her lover carried her

And then died of the desert-thirst.
 'Twas more than three days' journey
 Into the wilderness,
 —So goes the tale—
 And no other shelter there
 Than in the stone
 The Minnegrotto cleft.
 Yet three years
 These lovers lived
 Content and happy there,
 And so witchingly each other loved
 That their love
 The hope of maidens is.
 Now tell me, thou gay deceiver,
 Whence in the desert came
 Their bread
 And whence their drink?
 For without sustenance
 They could not live.
 And unless they lived
 They could not love?

AMOR, (*seriously*) to Momus:—

O Momus, to skeptics such as thou,
 Truth opens not her silver-mines.
 I know the tale,
 And know it true.
 Where love is
 There is no desert.
 And what they ate and drank?—
 The lovers on each other gazed:
 On that they lived.
 The harvest of the eye
 Was food sufficient.
 Their steadfastness,

Their love and troth,
Their vows,
The open-heartedness,
Which is the true bread
Of wedded souls:
These were the fruits
They freely plucked.
A well in the desert
Became the confidence,
Each in the other had,
And love the plowman
Which turned the rocks
Into fertile soil.
Together in their tillage
Did they walk,
And with the birds of heaven vied
With music of the heart
To fill the air.
Their love so true,
Their hearts so pure,
That sun and moon and stars
These trusting souls
Their favor showed.
'Tis no mystery:
For stony wastes
Are not love's limit,
And plighted hearts
From obstacles
Draw the relish of their feast.

ACT I.

SCENE:—Castle Ofterdingen.

PERSONS:—

Ronald.

Thusnelda.

Bridesmaids.

Flower-girls.

Berthelind, Ethelried, Rosamund.

INTERLUDE:—

Ragni, the Outcast.

PROLOG.

'Twas a June day memorable ;
 The birds sang sweeter,
 And the evening star shone brighter,
 When Lord Ronald
 Did Thusnelda wed :
 For never gallant knight
 A lovelier maiden
 To her bridal consecration led.

THUSNELDA, *before donning her bridal garments, has absented herself from the festivities, to take farewell of her favorite trysting-place.*

For just once more,
 For my last farewell,
 To thee, my faithful tree,
 I flee,
 Before the ring forever
 To another's will commits
 My happiness.

Thou hast heard his pleading
 And witnessed my consenting :
 His arguments,
 And my believing.
 Hast seen how bright and golden
 And jewel-studded, he showed the chain
 By which to his authority
 He is intent to shackle me,
 Persuading me that bondage to him
 Is greater freedom than my liberty.
 If it ever be
 The bondage in his kisses,
 In his endearing arms,
 In love's unfailing rapture,

O then of iron

Let my bonds be wrought.

But now, before the gate forever closes,

While yet my soul is mine,

Its virgin-conscience writing-free,

Before I yield my all,

And plunge into the ransom-spurning deep,

O my guardian tree,

Tell me truly now:

Will his love endure?

His kisses last?

Steadfast his heart abide?

And his assurance never shadow throw?

For, O, if from that golden chain

The jewels drop,

And from his eye

The love-light die,

And from his voice

The mellow accent fade,

Then tongue can never tell

The anguish of my stricken heart.

Thou wert the sponsor of our troth,

Does the rustling of thy leaves

Dare to tell me eye to eye

That Ronald is a lover true,

A lover to the end?

Farewell, then,

As the seal of my fate

Boldly I break.

But yet a moment more

Till the sweetness I rehearse

That now ripens

Into my wedding-morn.



The Maiden and Her Trousseau



Y heart is hopeful,
My heart is heavy,
My heart is singing,
My heart is dumb.

The flower once plucked
Can never bloom again.
Short is the morning-kiss
And long the day:
A two-fold meaning
Hath the bridal dress.

So gently thy boughs
 Bend low,
 And twine
 With the vine
 To graceless jesters
 Undisclosed to hold
 This bower mine.

I came upon this place when a child
 I gathered blue-berries wild.
 Here I sobbed my infant griefs,
 Here I prayed my real prayers :
 Did my penance,
 And walked with God.
 Here I built my castles of hope
 And hid myself
 For my prince to light upon me.
 —My lover led I here,
 And none, never none else.

The maidens call me now.
 O, why so eager to prepare me captive?
 A twofold meaning
 Hath the bridal dress.
 I am willing, but there is time.
 For anon, then, virgins, call in vain.
 In my last leave-taking let me linger,
 'Tis my girlhood's sanctuary
 I must leave forever.
 For the last hour my own
 Then his—
 A consort?
 Or passion's puppet?
 Which?—
 Ah me! Soothsaying never avails

When maiden-hopes
 Their heart-strings anchor.

This is the place
 Where Ronald the brave
 Hath wooed me so gently and fiercely,
 Wooed me as maiden loves to be wooed
 By the tyrant-emperor of woman's heart.
 This is the branch,
 And this is the root
 Where so often I made him sit.
 Thus his arms would round me steal,
 Thus on his bosom I reclined.
 Thus would he speak of his love,
 And thus he kissed my lips.
 (Nectar such as angels never drank.)

How strong, how noble he is.
 So fearless, so daring.
 He purchased my life,
 My gratitude is his and my love.
 'Twas in yonder field,
 Ethelried and I, daisies we sought,
 When my father's mad bull he braved.
 The awful horns I felt
 Entangled in my dress.
 Then Ronald's wild cry,
 His terrible cry of war, I heard,
 (How sweet to me the sound.)
 He seized the beast
 And choked the fuming nostrils.
 O terrible the battle,
 Round and round they circled,
 His veins and muscles grew big,
 Great drops of sweat fell from his brow :

A groan, a mighty pull
And awry was wrenched
The stiff neck of the brute.

But to me,
How gentle is he!
Softly, as among downs,
I nestle in his strength,
And as upon velvet,
I lay my cheek in his hands,
And gaze into the light of his eyes.
—O the happiness that here has been mine!

I watched him carve his name
Into the bark of the tree;
Then over it traced he mine:
Said he ever held me above him.
And made a circle around both:
Said it was love's fortress
As valiant knight
He would for me defend.
Then from near my feet
He plucked violets
And twined them into my locks,
And pelted me with apple-blossoms,
And from yonder brook
Gathered forget-me-nots.
With butter-cups from the ponds
And luscious berries
Out of the meadow,
With kisses between,
He gave me to eat,
And seized me in his arms
And kissed me more.
So Ronald hath loved me here
As maiden was never loved before.

But, farewell, sweet trysting place among the
 ferns:
 Farewell, my bower green, farewell.

AT THE CASTLE.

Ended is the wedding-banquet,
 The merry crowd hath danced its last,
 The boisterous guests departed:
 The nuptial benediction
 Ofterdingen's walls o'erspreads.
 Bride and bridegroom their holy hour
 approach,
 And angel-spirits hover near,
 As the lovers
 To the feast of love draw near,
 To drink the cup of Paradise
 The gods to men have given.

HISTORICAL.

The ancient Thuringian marriage consisted of several parts. There was a public procession to the church with its religious ceremony. Then came the feast at the castle or the bridegroom, in which the public and the guests took part. But after the departure of the guests there followed a more sacred ceremony at which only the immediate family and chosen friends of the bride were present. Its chief parts were the strewing of flowers, the lighting of the bridal candles and burning of incense by the girl-friends of the bride.

For this occasion she wore a symbolical girdle of flowers and wreath upon her head. The entrance to the bridal bower consisted of an arch of flowers with a symbolical threshold and the marriage-ceremony was not considered complete till the bridegroom took up his bride in his arms, placing her lips



The Woodland Flower



YOUTH went for adventures forth
Far from the city's grime,
Far from travel's hardened path,
Into the woodland and forest deep.
There came he upon a rare and precious flower.
The flower would he pluck,
And rashly tear the bleeding stem
From its twining rootlets forth.
The petals quivered,
Softly sang the nightingale above:
Heal what thou hast broken
With thy kiss;
Inviolat with thee
Remain the beauty of her soul.

to his, and thus with his kiss carried her across the bridal threshold to her new life.

Thereupon it became his duty to unloosen her girdle and deposit it upon the altar, when the candles and incense would be lit, the flower-girls and bridesmaids pass in procession through the bridal arch and receive from the bride a flower plucked from her wreath and also taking one from the bridal girdle upon the altar, which were treasured as love-charms by those who took part in the rites. The following are the songs sung on these occasions:—

SONG OF THE BRIDESMAIDS.

(Addressed to the bridegroom, while carrying his bride through the bridal arch.)

Tenderly now take thy bride
 Into thy arms.
 In thy heart enshrine her,
 With thy soul adore her,
 Thy queen appoint her,
 As the apple of thine eye
 Do thou guard her.
 The beauty of her soul
 Inviolatè with thee remain.
 To unclouded espousal
 Do thou lead her
 Through the portal
 Of thy lover-kiss.

SONG OF THE BRIDESMAIDS.

(Addressed to Thusnelda, while reclining in her lover's arms.)

To-day thou art fair,
 Yet on the morrow shalt thou fairer be.

To-day thou art the rosy bud,
 To-morrow the unfolding blossom.
 Thy crown is now preparing
 For the noon-tide sun
 Thy morning to eclipse.
 Then, O, our sister, as thy lips
 The kiss of womanhood receive
 Do thou pray for us,
 For to Life's priestess
 Of Heaven nothing is denied.
 The flowers of thy wreath
 Now cast to us
 As sacred token
 That before twelve moons have passed
 We, too, the golden path shall walk.

SIGUNE, *Mother to Thusnelda, aside:—*

Thus of the jewels of the mother-heart
 Builds youth its summer-house:
 And with lavish hands
 Scatters the gems
 Of tears and anxious watching
 As if it were the sea-shore's sand.
 Her that is more than life to me
 To him I give:
 Yet must not show the trickling tear
 And without sign of loss
 Renounce my bosom-treasure,
 Because a wooer
 On her his eye hath cast.
 Joy for them her garlands winds
 While her twin-sister Sorrow
 Beckons me the dreary path

With her to walk.
 O motherhood, thou meaning-laden word,
 Storehouse of the heart's
 Unfathomed treasures,
 From doll to wedding-bells,
 And thence to children's children,
 Thy tortuous emotions
 Run the gamut of a woman's heart.
 Half joy, half pain :
 Yet neither would I miss
 For of the higher and the lower chords
 This soul-deep harmony is wrought.

I knew my spring was past.
 Yet in my fancy proudly wore
 The summer's bloom upon my brow,
 —Since Venice's mirrors
 Have not yet tinged my hair with gray—
 When Berthelind, my first-born, came,
 Drew me aside, and stammered :
 "Mother, O Grandmother dear."
 Then I heard the toll of autumn leaves,
 And bade my quivering heart
 Turn to view the setting sun.
 I can grow no more,
 No longer glad surprises
 Are held for me in store.
 Hence only can I give :
 Nevermore receive.
 My joy must be
 With others to rejoice,
 And from younger faces
 Wipe the tears.
 Friend, counselor and guide

Through life's entangled mazes
 Perchance I may yet be:
 But actor on the stage
 In its enchanted dream?
 Not once again
 —Gone are my days of youth.
 Ah, for love,
 Life is much too short.
 'Twas but yesterday
 Tiny garments I fashioned
 In hope of promises yet unfulfilled.
 (With daring I had braved the dawn,
 And with a song my eager heart,
 If fate had so ordained,
 To its execution would have gone.)
 But to-day with other feelings
 I watch my daughters do the same.

One by one
 Are my blossoms plucked
 To shine for other eyes.
 Soon a branchless tree,
 Of its glory shorn,
 I stand.
 Deep cuts the knife:
 But they shall never know.
 See how he snatches her from me,
 And as robber to his lair
 He carries her.
 And she herself
 Bids me welcome
 The spoiler of my heart:
 For that she has a mother
 A bride knows not.

Ah, woman never gives herself alone :
 Her own, and her mother's soul,
 Both she strews at her lover's feet.

Yet do I acknowledge
 That dear to me is Ronald :
 Since I of my son,
 And he of his mother is bereft.
 When first to me
 Thusnelda brought him in
 He grasped my hand and kissed it
 And faintly lisped the wonder-word
 "Mother" unto me.
 Then tears filled his pleading eye.
 I kissed him on the brow
 And softly answered, "Son,"
 Then left them to each other,
 Fled to my room and wept :
 For in tears alone the woman-heart
 Can gush its fulness forth.

But to-night, not yet
 Is the time of tears,
 A little longer
 Must I steel myself against the floods
 That no discord in their joy be heard.
 With happy mien will I stand
 Till the breaking of all ties is done :
 Then will I take my empty heart
 And we will weep,
 Alone will we weep.

YOUNG FLOWER-GIRL (*passing through the bridal arch*):—

I know not what I carry,

Nor why upon this altar
 These flowers so tremblingly I lay.
 My heart, O my heart,
 With fear and joy
 It flutters strange and full.
 I know a youth so fair,
 He looked on me the other day:
 O what meant his look?
 What meant his look?

SECOND FLOWER-GIRL:—

With reverence this flower
 From thy bridal girdle
 To my breast I pin:
 For I am older, sisters, than you think,
 My heart is ready,
 Pining, ah, for him
 Who is my sun.
 To my lips this flower I press,
 Now do I consecrate myself:
 After this no other kiss,
 Till he whose right it is
 Shall come.

OLDER FLOWER-GIRL, *aside*:—

O lover mine!
 Why dost thou tarry?
 Pluck up thy courage
 And make bold
 To ask of me the question
 Which most I dread,
 Yet almost dying, long to hear.
 O lisp the pregnant word

That shall make me faint and pale
 And shake me as an aspen-leaf.
 To thy arrow
 I my heart lay bare.
 O ask of me,
 And ask enough
 That I be no longer free,
 But be pledged forever unto thee.

ETHELRIED, *Sister to Thusnelda, one of the Brides-
 maids:—*

I must not, I dare not tell,
 Yet silence cannot keep.
 Have ever you seen
 A face so blushing,
 And lips so red as mine?
 A girl as a dove so shy
 And happy as the lark?
 The reason?—
 He hath kissed me,
 Much, O much, against my will.
 And I kissed him back,
 (Against my will).
 He clasped me in his arms,
 He drew me to his breast,
 I said "You must not!"
 He drew me closer,
 (I could not breathe),
 I held him fast,
 And kissed once more.
 How many followed, I cannot confess:
 For you would never believe me
 They could be so many,
 So sweet and so long.

'Tis our secret,
 For our love is true :
 I am happy,
 His kiss hath made me so.

A BRIDESMAID, *to herself*:—

When for the holy war
 From our village he departed,
 He took me by the hand :
 He pressed it warmly,
 Then caressed it,
 And looked into my eyes
 Down into my heart.
 He went,
 And never message has he sent me.
 O men are fickle,
 Men are false.

Perhaps he meant it not,
 But my heart is heavy.
 He broke the sacred seal,
 And kept the key :
 I cannot be another's,
 Yet he claims me not.
 I am forsaken.
 In the silent watches of the night
 I shed my burning tears,
 The vision faileth me,
 My hope is dimmed,
 My heart is sore.

ROSAMUND, *Thusnelda's youngest sister*:—

O Thusnelda, the dearest of my sisters.
 Till Ronald came

All thy heart I possessed.
(Mayhap for thy sake
Do I forgive him).
O the men—
 From thy lips
Thy last virgin kiss
Have I come to snatch,
And well-guarded
Will I keep it in my vow
Never to be bound or wed:
For youth's holiday
In the marriage-ring is ended.
Each wedding leaner makes
My comradeship.
Berthelind scarce knows me now
Since her baby came
(The sweet little thief)
—She says I do not understand.—
And in her happiness
No room for me hath Ethelried,
In a day
Is she a woman grown:
She romps with me no more.
And, dearest Thusnelda,
I know it well,
As to thy lover thou art closer drawn
To me wilt thou colder grow.
I hate the men,
The cause of this
And all our other griefs.
I hate them all—
All but One.

BERTHELIND, *Thusnelda's married sister, while the
bridal candles and incense are lit, in a whisper:—*

O sister dear, the fairest of us four,
Soon at life's altar shalt thou stand
And heaven's blessing claim.
Let me whisper in thy ear
Not to fear
When the dawn of womanhood
Thy being thrills.
Thy lover is an honorable man,
(I've read it in his eye)
Tender and kind,
Strong to rule the unruly realm.
Unwaveringly cast thyself into his trust
And without question
Give as woman gives.
With gladness
Thy treasure shalt thou bear,
The hallowed secret know,
And find thy nature's satisfying,
For the tenderest joy
In the deepest pain is rooted.

FINAL CHORUS OF THE BRIDESMAIDS.

(While leaving the bridal bower.)

A bridegroom so handsome,
So manly,
To thy safekeeping
We commit our sister
Spotless as Eve in Paradise
Heaven's perfect handiwork.
With thy strength overshadow her,

A Bride Adorned for Her Husband



HY such infinite pains
For my dress
And my adorning?
'Tis for him.

His joy
Is all my thought and care.
No misplaced lock
Must show my hair.
No unsmoothed ruffle
Disclose my dress.
Each one a treasured flower
One more for him
To crush and disarrange.
To the brim would I fill his cup
And rich his spoiling make
For Life's one sweetest hour
Is the Bridal Hour.

With thy life redeem her :
Worthily to thy arms
Receive her ! Good Night.

CHORUS OF THE FLOWER-GIRLS.

Flowers red, flowers white,
Flowers young, flowers fresh,
Flowers enchanted, flowers prophesying
At thy feet we strew :
For thy path
Is the path of roses and of lilies :
The mystery that with the rainbow's halo
Shall thy face transform :
For youth's one sweetest hour
Is the bridal hour.—Good Night.

INTERLUDE.

RAGNI, THE OUTCAST.

RAGNI, *a former companion of Thusnelda and her friends, but now an outcast, has stealthily approached the castle-window, and with her young babe secretly watched the nuptials:*

O Thusnelda, never canst thou know
 How the innocent do suffer.
 'Tis well thou thinkest not of me this hour,
 For I would not mar thy joy:
 Only from afar behold
 What for myself I hoped.
 Yet each flower in thy wreath
 Is to my side a pricking thorn.
 I loved so much, so truly,
 And trusted so confidingly:
 I believed him honest as myself.
 But he basely left me:
 Left me with the pledge
 Of woman's crowning-glory:
 The babe that now proclaims my shame.

Proud as the proudest
 By his side would I have walked,

And with my infant shown myself
 At every public concourse triumphant
 That I am not a woman born in vain.
 But, ah, my darling,
 How heavily thy father's sins
 Do fall upon us!

He forsook me,
 Broke the oath he swore me:
 Wherefore, O my sisters, ye tread me under
 foot.

Ye mock me for my trust,
 And hold your skirts aloof from me
 As if I were a viper.
 With fresh stumbling blocks
 Ye daily pave my thorny path.
 I am cast off,
 Therefore ye declare me fallen.
 O for a friendly tear,
 A sympathizing heart!
 But alas there is no bosom-friend,
 Nor boon-companion, nor sister
 For her whom her lover wronged.

But for my babe, in part
 Ye would forgive me.
 —As if the sin were less
 That is in secret done.—
 Ye know not what I suffer:
 Ye know not how I love
 This orphan-child, ye call a bastard,
 And a child of sin.
 Nay, to me 'tis a child of succor,
 'Twas born of faith and love,
 'Tis my inmost own
 Twice am I its mother,
 Once in the God-appointed pains

And now in persecution.
 Why do ye judge so harshly :
 The child sinned not,
 And I, its mother,
 Suffer, as no other mortals suffer.
 His father's love hath failed him
 But never faileth
 Mother-love and woman's constancy.

Ah, my fatherless darling,
 On what unfriendly shores art thou cast.
 The righteous wish thee dead,
 The scoffers mock thee as the harlot's child,
 And hypocrites hail thee
 As the welcome prod
 To gash my bleeding heart anew.
 Because thy father left us
 Must we ever tremble
 As the sparrow from the hawk,
 And walk with downcast eyes,
 And creep about by night,
 (For in the sunlight scorners sit)
 And ever eat our bread in tears.
 O let us heaven's judgment seek,
 For surely He that knows it all
 Cannot be so unmerciful
 As is the world to her
 Who loved and was forsaken.

Come, my sleeping darling,
 Thy mother never was a bride :
 (Unholy hands robbed us of our crown)
 Let us end our misery.
 'Twas at yonder lake
 On a mild autumn night,

The grass was yet green,
 The leaves were gold and yellow,
 I with my lover sat
 (Then still a lover true)
 —When heaven our betrothal witnessed.—
 There, in the cool waves,
 Of that self-same lake
 Will we find the soothing of our sorrow.

She seizes her babe and in a fit of despair runs with it to the lake. As she arrives at its shores, the moon stands full above the forest. The babe awakens and opens its eyes.

One last look now, the very last
 Into these sweet blue eyes.
 A kiss, then the grewsome murmur of the
 waves,
 And all is over.
 Ah my babe, thou wert his covenant of love.
 In thine eyes I see him once again,
 His better self is there:
 How could he do it?
 Warm upon the bed
 In another's arms now he lies,
 And thou and I, how we suffer
 Homeless in the cold!
 O God, we come:
 In thy mercy this thy child receive.

(Walks to the brink of the water, but hesitates for a moment)

Nay, but thou art his child,
 And my heart not wholly closed to him.

—But vain is my hope.—
How have I for thee suffered!
—Still will I suffer—
And uncomplainingly woman's lot
Upon me take:
For to make atonement of man's sin
Was woman born.
Thou art innocent.
—Sacred was the hour—
His baseness I'll forgive
And heaven bless
I thee possess.

ACT II.

SCENE:—The Bridal Bower.

Cupid,

Ronald,

Thusnelda.



IN THE BRIDAL BOWER.

CUPID, *to the lovers*.—

When once upon a time
 The Lord of Life
 A charmed flower would plant,
 He did not with lightning rend the sky
 And summoned not the giants of the air
 With thunder-trumpet forth.
 Gentleness he laid upon his mighty strength.
 He sought a shaded, dewy spot,
 He hushed the storm
 And hung Æol's harp
 Upon the entrance
 Of the foliage-covered bower
 Hid from the garish sun.
 There in the moist earth
 A little root he buried,
 And painted green
 The broad leaves
 Of the jewel's setting.
 The flower-bell
 He made of purest white,
 Gave it a golden heart,
 And sent an angel
 To hide therein
 A maiden-kiss.

So was the lily of the valley made.
 Modest, yet in beauty unsurpassed,
 Of faith and love and hope
 The emblem grows.

So kiss the kiss of youth
 As lilies kiss:
 And kiss again,
 And deeper yet again,
 Till ye be no longer twain.

THUSNELDA, *to herself*:—

I am nearly faint,
 My bosom heaves,
 My heart beats fast,
 A virgin I am to the altar led
 To be a woman born.

RONALD, *to himself*:—

How pure,
 How beautiful and lovely
 Is my Thusnelda.
 How trustful the questioning
 Of her eyes!
 What lips for kissing made!
 Fair art thou as the placid lake,
 Thy face of heaven's blue
 The perfect mirror.
 O may no cloud thy radiance dim
 As in awe I take thee to myself
 And in thy kisses bathe.

Then to Thusnelda, taking her hand and caressing it:—

Dearest, dost remember,
 When first thou gavest me this hand?
 'Twas at my mother's grave,
 Thou stood'st beside me there,
 'Twas God who led thee there.
 In that hour of darkness
 Thou came'st a shining star
 Across my path.
 Thy gentle sympathy brought hope
 In hopeless days.
 Thou griev'dst with me,
 And assuaged'st my grief.
 Thy modest dignity entranced my heart.
 Sweet were our wooing days.
 Sweet the light
 Then shining in thine eyes.
 I knew thou lovedst me truly,
 Yet kep'st thyself a guarded fortress.
 But in that hour so holy
 When the stars their love-beams twinkle,
 And angels from immortal thrones descend
 To sigh for mortal bliss,
 Thou didst of me accept thy bridal kiss.
 O the thrills and rapture of that kiss!
 The earnest of our happiness to-be,
 The budding of our hope,
 The promise of our life's fruition:
 O that first kiss of thine,
 On this day that thou art wholly mine,
 O kiss it to me again
 A thousand thousand times.

Kisses her with a long kiss, then tenderly:—

Thusnelda, Dear One,
We are bride and bridegroom now;
The words of the holy priest
Have made us One.

THUSNELDA *whispers:—*

I know it,
I am happy in thy arms,
Altogether do I trust myself to thee.
And thou wilt never fail me,
Wilt thou, Ronald,
For I am proud of thee?

RONALD:—

My love far stronger is
Than the holy oath I vowed.
No power in earth or heaven
Can break it.
Give me thy lips again
That I may swear my soul anew to thee.

CUPID, *to Thusnelda, while in her lover's rapturous embrace:—*

'Twas I that smote thy heart with love,
'Twas I that bound him fast to thee,
His eye shall see none fairer,
His heart no other passion know.
I told him of thy grace:
I must prove it now to him,

Give me thy veil and bridal garments,
This night thou needest them no more.
In all thy virgin-loveliness
Before him shalt thou stand:
Thy innocence his virtue's stay,
His angel-enchantress
And protecting goddess.

ACT III.

SCENE:—Heaven. The Elysian Regions.

Ronald and Thusnelda.

Nereid and Naiad, the Bridal Nymphs.

The Heavenly Choir.

Cunina, the Disconsolate.

The Furies.

HISTORICAL.

According to an old Thuringian legend, each undefiled earthly marriage had a heavenly counterpart. It was said that at the instant of the wedded bridegroom's first kiss, the souls of the lovers were transplanted to Heaven by two bridal nymphs, named Nereid and Naiad, who conducted them to the Elysian regions and acted as their guides through the heavenly nuptials.

Antiphonal lightning from the Evening and Morning stars announces to the dwellers in heaven the approach of the Bridal Souls.

SONG OF THE HEAVENLY CHOIR.

Hail to the Holy One,
Hail to the Chosen One,
Hail to the Bride,
The morning-star of Life.

NAIAD, *to the Betrothed*:—

O happy mortals,
Who have vowed the vow
Heaven-pleasing,
Earth-redeeming,
Here in Elysium's bowers
Plight your troth anew
That everything on earth begun
In heaven its completion find.

The lovers are conducted before Paltar, heaven's testing light, which will hide its face, if they are unworthy. If, on the other hand, they are found pure, the light is not dimmed. (The impure are not allowed any further progress in heaven. They are forever denied entrance to Fensalir and are sent back to earth with a worm gnawing at their vitals.)

Ronald and Thusnelda pass before Paltar:—the light remains undimmed, they are allowed full access to the Elysian regions.

NEREID, to Ronald:—

Consider the jewel that to thee is given,
 For thou knowest not
 The age-long groaning of the universe,
 The yearning, silent brooding
 Of the Spirit
 Till from chaos
 Woman's beauty did arise:
 Nor how in agonies untold
 And blindly groping,
 Ever upward striving,
 Ever thwarted, devious paths
 Compelled to wander,
 Seeking light
 And never the veil of darkness
 Fully piercing,
 Thirsting after truth
 And still unquenched remaining:
 O in what birth-throes
 Is perfection born!
 —There she stands.
 Heaven's glory, now thy bride.

Nymphs now carry Thusnelda to Glitnir, the crystal lake, and assist her in the bridal bath. Nereid leads Ronald around the lake in the opposite direction till he meets his bride again.

NEREID to Ronald:—

Glitnir, this crystal sea,
 Is Life's mysterious fountain,
 The secret of the lily's white,

The fragrance of the rose,
 The tulip's color
 And the verdant green of Spring.
 'Tis the love-note of the nightingale,
 The heart of music,
 And of art the soul
 Perfection's mirror, to show thee
 What else from mortal eyes is veiled,
 What thou hast never seen,
 Hast never known,
 And never dreamed:
 Fairer than myself,
 Though in heaven I am accounted fair.
 Behold, now yonder look,
 What seest thou?

RONALD, *answering*:—

I see a goddess
 By her train attended
 In the tranquil waters bathing,
 And fairies in the silver-spray
 Her roseate image tracing.

Then, to himself:—

I dare not look again.
 My heart, keep still,
 And be not reckless:
 The conquest of the gods
 Is not for thee.

NEREID, *to Ronald*:—

Come with me
The hidden path
On Glitnir's shore
And let thy love-sighs urge thee on
Till the echo of thy heart
Thou find.

THUSNELDA, reclining upon the shore, is handed a magic mirror by one of her attendants.

NAIAD, *to Thusnelda*:—

Look deep into this mirror
And of it thy future question.
'Tis he who seeketh thee
That walks the crystal path:
Thy lover, lord and king.

Thusnelda, absorbed in the mirror:—

I always knew my Ronald was a man,
And altogether a man,
Yet far handsomer is he
Than ever I divined.
How erect he stands,
How graceful in his strength,
From head to foot
No blemish upon him anywhere.
No puny, weakling seed
From him can issue.
O Ronald, gladly and undismayed

Is Thusnelda thy bride.

O that I had a thousand hearts to give
Instead of one,
And were a goddess now,
Then heaven's lights would I pluck
To weave my lover's crown:
Yet though I gave the day,
And all the brightness of the sky,
'Twere not half I fain would give to thee.

Nereid, with Ronald, emerges from the shaded path. They come suddenly upon Thusnelda with her nymphs, braiding lilies of the valley into her hair.

RONALD, *upon beholding Thusnelda*:—

O Thusnelda, my bride,
How spotlessly thy robe of innocence
Thy hidden worth proclaims.
Thy eyes, thy lips, thy hair
Betray the sapphire-glow within.
How marvelous the soul
That such an habitation
For its dwelling framed!
Thy skin so white;
Thy crimson blush
As roses in the morning-dew.
Thy arms a Goddess lent thee,
Thy hands the Graces kissed,
Thy loins in Beauty's curves enclosed,
Thy feet with angel sandals shod:
Thou art the queen of heaven
And fairer than the fair,
Never eyes have seen such comeliness
As can with thee compare.

CUNINA, the disconsolate nymph of heaven, approaches to conduct the lovers to Fensalir, where they are to drink the cup of Immortality.

HISTORICAL.

It is said that Cunina always took unusual interest in the affairs of men. Once she witnessed the blush of a maiden at her first kiss and at another time came upon a young mother at play with her babe. She believed that here she saw happiness unknown in heaven. Thereafter she ever remained disconsolate.

CUNINA, *to the lovers*:—

I have dwelt on earth
 And seen its sorrows,
 Beheld its pains
 And mourned the desolation
 That from human sin leaps forth:
 Yet love for all is compensation,
 The healing balm for deepest wounds.
 We here are called the Blest:
 We have no night,
 And hence know not the morning thrill.
 Here, where we never grow old,
 We were never young.
 We, that weep not at the grave,
 Can never feel the cradle-smile
 Tugging at the mother-heart
 And where there is no sorrow
 Rejoicing hath but half its worth.
 O, for an hour of youth and love
 I would exchange my changeless bliss
 And count not death
 Too high a price
 To gain a Lover's Paradise.
 And if over love that is lost

The Cradle Smile



MILE, baby mine, smile,

'Tis thy papa's smile.

Now smile again:

'Tis mamma's smile this time.

And one smile more:

'Tis thy baby-smile.

O how deeply through my soul

Plays the cradle-smile

This threefold chord of love

On the harp of my heart.

**A Youth, a Maiden,
And a Kiss**



HEY walked to-gether,
They talked together,
His voice grew soft
Her heart beat loud.

Softer still his voice
Louder still her heart,
Then language failed:
A kiss—a conquered heart.
'Tis done:
The binding
That shall have no unwinding.

I must mourn
The bitter-sweetness
Still is sweet.

They arrive at Hymen's altar, where the lovers are bound with the silver chord.

CUNINA, *to the lovers*:—

With unshod feet
These steps ascend
To the binding that
Shall have no unwinding.
Arm in arm,
And hand clasping hand,
That pulse beating upon pulse,
Henceforth one life only
Pulse through you both:
With the silken silver-cord of love
I bind you to unchanging faithfulness
'Tis in the universe
The strongest tie:
The fire it abides
And endures affliction.
Naught but faithlessness can sunder it.
And, O the horror of its breaking.

Before entering Fensalir, they must pass the abode of the Furies, who demand the souls of the betrothed as fee, should they ever prove unfaithful to each other.

FIRST FURY, *to the lovers*:—

Bride and bridegroom
Say ye that ye are,
And in one short hour would quaff

The happiness
 Of all eternity's distilling.
 O heedless sons of men,
 Heaven's greatest gift
 Far too lightly do ye judge.
 Never to Fensalir shall ye pass
 Till ye swear
 With your souls forever to pay
 The penalty of faithlessness.

THE FURIES, *in chorus*:—

And we will claw your flesh,
 And tear your veins,
 And rend your heart,
 And suck your blood,
 And blind your eyes,
 And thresh your vitals,
 And dance on your bones,
 And sink you into the vortex of hell,
 We will, we will.

CUNINA, *sadly*:—

*And the innocent
 Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

SECOND FURY, *to Ronald*:—

And I will scatter thy youth,
 And shatter thy hopes,
 And the death-knell
 In thy marrow rattle.

CUNINA:—

*And the innocent
 Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

THIRD FURY, *to Thusnelda*:—

And with the furrows
Of sorrow
Will I mar thy face.
And for repentance
There shall be no room
In thy doom.

CUNINA:—

*And the innocent
Shall suffer more than the guilty.*

Tremblingly Thusnelda seeks shelter in Ronald's arms, who stoops to caress her, whereupon, since love is stronger than fear, the Furies vanish.

CUNINA, *to Thusnelda*:—

O happy daughter of earth,
Heaven's goldenest path
Dost thou tread.
With thee to thy joy
We may not enter.
Thy consecration
Is to us denied:
For we are vestals only,
Thou of life
The sacred shrine itself.

[The Lovers enter Fensalir.]

THE HEAVENLY CHOIR:—

*And God saw the works
Which he had made
And behold, they were very good.*

ACT IV.

SCENE:—Fensalir, the Temple of Immortality.

Freya, Goddess of Health and Fruitfulness.

Bonald.

Thusnelda.

FENSALIR.

RONALD, *to Thusnelda*:—

O Thusnelda, queen of my heart,
 How beautiful thou stood'st
 At Glitnir's waters.
 Now let me take thy hand and lips
 Thy Lover's sealing
 Shall be vouchsafed thee
 That thou thy completer self attain.
 To the awe of angels let us go:
 At thy being's solemn quiver
 I will near thee stand.

THUSNELDA, *to herself*:—

How strange is Love!
 How deep its mysteries!
 Who is worthy
 Life's secret springs to touch
 And full womanhood to know?
 O my lover kind,
 My trembling pardon,
 And swear again to me
 Eternal constancy
 For I give my soul to thee
 White, as it came from God:

O so let thy burning kiss
 Prove to me thine own
 Unstained purity,
 And though I doubt thee not
 'Tis sweet to hear thy vows.

FREYA, the Goddess of Health, enters and presents the Cup of Immortality to the Lovers:—

This is the Cup of Immortality,
 Take each your chalice,
 And drink of it.
 —Then self with self exchange—
 And press it to each other's lips,
 And from the self-same spot
 The other drank
 Quaff it to the end
 Till soul in soul dissolve:
 For in the bridal blush to glow
 Is creation's final, perfect end.

The echo of the Heavenly Choir is heard in the portals of Fensalir:—

*What in heaven
 God hath joined to-gether,
 Let not man
 Asunder part.*

[Exit Freya. The lovers remain alone.]

RONALD, to Thusnelda, while drinking each other's cup:—

O Thusnelda, bride of brides,
 How could I dream
 Thy marriage-kiss

The Maiden at Her Devotions



WHEN at eventide
At my bedside
I bend my knees,
All evil from me flees.

In the confessing tear
My God draws near.
O blessed hour of prayer,
How sweet to linger
In thy fragrant air,
Where bloom the flowers
Of the rising sun.

Would be this bliss
 With wealth untold
 In thee love's kingdom is endowed.
 Thou art truth transparent,
 Thy tender touch
 The healing
 Of Loki's poisoned darts.*
 O thou fairest jewel of womankind,
 All the treasures of the soul
 Twice purified
 In thee are found.

How bountifully thou now repay'st
 Thy reluctance of our wooing days
 When ne'er, but through a veil,
 Thy kisses thou wouldst grant.
 For thy great day
 Hast thou kept the manna,
 And ever presseth
 Sweeter sweetness to my lips.

I gaze into thine eyes,
 O rapturous delight!
 In the garden of thy heart,
 I am received
 To feast with thee
 Where bloom the flowers
 Of the rising sun.
 All thy woman-hopes
 Hast thou plucked
 A poesy to gather me.
 With thyself thou enrichest me.
 I drink thy soul.
 Do thou drink mine—
 'Tis heaven itself—O more than heaven—
 I wed thee
 With the resurrection-kiss,

*LOKI, the evil god-in Thuringian mythology.

Faith to her joy awakens,
 Our destiny
 With purple clothed,
 I am of thee—O happiness of happiness—
 And thou of me
 Forever and forever
 Each other's love-kissed other self.

*From Adnir, at the foot of the rainbow, out of the
 abyss of the Unborn, whose bonds only maiden-hands
 can loosen, prayer ascends to Thusnelda's ears:—*

From out of the shadowy deep,
 From the timeless gloom
 And fetters of night,
 For our deliverance,
 O maiden, we plead with thee.
 Our unformed beings pity:
 O give us the dawn:
 With thyself our hunger still,
 And of the rainbow weave us
 Childhood's garment
 Of laughter and frolicsome days.
 Thy prayers teach our lips,
 And softly sing thy speech our mother-tongue.
 Sow freely of thy heart's aspiring
 Reap in us thy harvest of hope
 And out of our helplessness
 Build thee the fairest castle
 Of thy soul.

THUSNELDA, *sings softly:—*

Tiny blossoms
 Praying for the morning sun,

Tiny hands
By mother-yearning answered,
Tiny voices
My heart-throb's music chiming,
Tiny tears
By tenderest pity dried:
Heaven's flowers
I water with my hands.

INTERLUDE ON EARTH.

SCENE:—Bedchamber of Eunice, the Unwooded,
a Bridesmaid.

EUNICE, THE UNWOOD.

EUNICE, *sitting upon her bed, partly disrobed, toying
with the flowers from the bridal girdle:—*

How becomingly did this girdle
Thusnelda's waist encircle!
How proud she looked
When so tenderly
Ronald did unloosen it!
How beautiful to be a bride,
O how I long—
'Tis woman's glory,
'Tis her all.

Was I a woman born
To be denied my right?
And shall my nature
Never reach its full intoxication?
Nor never know its rightful pangs?
And never taste the joy
That lies beyond the mortal agony?
Shall I never minister my infant's wants
No suckling carry on my breast?
O who damns me so to fail
Of my destiny:
That childless, unkissed
And empty-handed
My lonely, unmourned grave
I must seek?

Full twenty summers have I seen
Under my window
The linden-tree

Deck herself in bridal green;
 And heard the robin
 Twitter to its mate:
 "Hey-ho, Springtime is love-time,
 Here will we build our nest,
 And rear our brood,
 And live for love
 And love for life,
 Hey-ho, hey-ho."

O is there no throne
 In the heart of some brave youth
 Where I may reign?
 What sin have I committed
 That no lover
 In the world is found for me?
 Am I not worthy as my sisters?
 Hath another
 As much as I to give?
 Is it in vain,
 That pure I kept myself
 For him who does not come?

In the dance
 Some have drawn me close,
 And whispered words unlawful:
 For I missed the love-lit eyes
 Of Passion's sacred fire
 Guarded holy in the heart.
 Wanton indulgence they sought
 And would heaven itself defile
 To gain a victim for their lust.
 No woman's heart could they unclasp:

They meant not as they should,
They wooed not truly,
But added to my sorrow
That tempters there are many
And lovers none.
O God, remember me!

ACT V.

SCENE:—Castle Ofterdingen.

Ronald and Thusnelda.

The Treasure of the Toiler's
Home, or
The Husband's Kiss



WHEN standing in our door-way,
The even twilight
Round me gathers,
And thy child in my arms
Down the roadside
His father's form discovers,
Returning from thy toil,
And my heart once more
Beats calm
In assurance of my prayer answered
That spared thee through the day.
Then, O then, kiss me
With thy husband-kiss.

THUSNELDA.

THUSNELDA, *to herself*:—

The secret longings of my being
Are now fulfilled.
The eternal pleading answered.
I am a happy bride.
I am a 'Woman' satisfied.

Then to Ronald:—

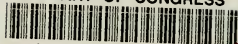
My star is risen high,
With honor thy ring I wear.
Give thy wife thy lips
To kiss thee
With her new kiss.
At the appointed time
Thy prayer in my body
Shall be granted thee.

So now shelter me,
And watch over me
With thy tenderest care.
Sweetly in thy arms
Will I sleep
Till the morning dawn
In the East.
Then do thou waken me
With thy husband-kiss.

THE END.

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